



NEWS RELEASE

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ■ BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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BLM Issues Plan for Limited, Environmentally Sensitive Oil and Gas Development in Otero and Sierra Counties

The Bureau of Land Management has issued an innovative plan for limited, environmentally sensitive oil and gas development on public lands in Otero and Sierra Counties. It is one of the most restrictive plans ever developed for oil and gas leasing on federal lands.

The plan will allow strictly regulated and carefully monitored activity, leading to a maximum surface disturbance of only 1,589 acres from well pads, roads and pipelines – less than one-tenth of one percent of the total surface area of 2 million acres. At most, there will be 141 exploratory wells drilled, resulting in up to 84 producing wells.

“We have the science, the tools, and the will to ensure that the very limited amount of exploration and development allowed under this plan is accomplished under today’s strict environmental and social standards,” said Linda Rundell, State Director of the BLM in Santa Fe.

Almost 36,000 acres of grasslands with the highest potential as habitat for the endangered Aplomado falcon will be closed to leasing and permanently protected. In addition to these measures and overall limits on development, leasing will not be allowed in six existing and eight proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and four Wilderness Study Areas—bringing the total number of protected acres to 124,000.

All disturbed areas within leases must be replanted with native Chihuahuan desert plants before other areas can be developed. The BLM developed strict criteria to determine when reclamation is successful. “Our reclamation strategy is aggressive and adaptable to the various stages of oil and gas development,” said Ed Roberson, manager of BLM’s Las Cruces Field Office. “Reclamation will be a systematic effort to ensure it’s completed with appropriate vegetation for each site.”

The plan amends a 1986 Resource Management Plan that would have allowed leasing with few restrictions on oil and gas activities, would have used standard lease terms and conditions for leasing, and would not have provided the protections for grasslands and other sensitive areas developed in the BLM’s current plan amendment.

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When interest in the area's potential for natural gas increased, BLM stopped further leasing to engage the public, local communities, state agencies, and affected interests in developing an amended, more restrictive plan that would incorporate additional protections for the area's natural resources.

"Otero County and many other partners -- the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division, Department of Game and Fish, State Land Office, Resource Advisory Committee, ranchers, the conservation community, oil and gas industry, and interested members of the public -- helped develop this plan," Roberson added. "We worked closely with County Commissioners to provide environmental protections while allowing for economic opportunities. We'll continue working with our partners to develop Best Management Practices and apply effective reclamation procedures."

While allowing orderly and responsible development of oil and gas on public land, the plan also will promote development of State Trust lands, which will benefit the local economy and New Mexico schoolchildren.

Under the current plan, BLM will develop a leasing strategy that takes into account factors such as industry interest, natural resource concerns, and ongoing exploration or development. BLM will offer a limited number of leases in blocks over time on the Otero Mesa and Nutt grasslands in order to monitor exploration and production activity, and to determine the conditions under which additional lease parcels may be offered.

Copies of the Record of Decision and the RMP Amendment will be available from the BLM in Santa Fe, Roswell and Las Cruces, New Mexico, or online at **www.nm.blm.gov**.

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